

Rancho Mastatal Updates

December 2006

The Ranch community has been shaking, hooping, sweating, dancing, Frisbeeing, laughing, building, Hohling and cranking it out in ways that make newcomers' mouths drop to the floor in disbelief. We've more or less finished assembling the 2007 "Dry Season Dream Team" and as a result the first third of our new year promises to deliver some marvelous surprises both at the Ranch and in the community of Mastatal. SPARKILISCIOUS, GRANDELÓN, A SMITH, GREG and KAREN, LA BRUJITA, MISS JUMP, SHMAXINE and NATE have been joined by a host of new All-Stars including HEATHER, MIKE and ERIN, JON MINGLE, CHRIS REMMERS and JULIE AITCHESON. These folks will comprise the core Ranch crew during the busiest time of our year as we play host in the coming months to the [Aerie School for Backcountry Medicine](#), [Solar Energy International](#), [HaveHeart](#), the [Randolph School](#), Villanova University, the [Yestermorrow Design/Build School](#) and the University of Washington.



A view of the mountains from the front entrance to the Choza

The sense of family around the Ranch these days is as evident and comfortable as anything I have ever experienced in my life. Being surrounded by and interacting with the most incredible people you could ever imagine meeting in your life is a real blessing. Each year we think about ways to ensure that this phenomenon continues to pervade the Ranch for decades to come. About ways to continue making the Ranch a conduit for amazing work and a space that allows people, particularly those passionately interested and active in making our planet a more sustainable one, to get together and conjure up ways to live an active, healthy, simple and more responsible life while providing the same for those in the communities in which we live.

If at some point you plan on joining the forces at the Ranch, it helps to bring along a healthy sense of humor, a thirst for having fun and learning and an easy ability to laugh at yourself. Because you'll cackle until your belly hurts, will have more fun than you thought possible while learning a set of skills that will serve you for the remainder of life, and without a doubt you'll get made fun of. It's a way of life here. If it's not Katia or Laura ripping you a new one in the kitchen in a language you don't understand, it will be Sparky making fun of your fashion choice for the day. But hey, it builds character. This ain't your typical summer camp. But it is a place that will change your life in

ways that you would never imagine. Enjoy the ride. See you next time.

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RM Program News: Practicing our ABCs with WFR

Always remember your ABC's: Airway, Breathing, Circulation. Before the WFR course stormed our senses with important information for saving lives, I would probably have overlooked this basic foundation. This is just one component of many that you learn to responsibly and correctly monitor during emergency situations through the Wilderness First Responder course that DAVE MCEVOY and FERNANDO GIACCAGLIA annually teach at the Ranch through the Aerie School for Backcountry Medicine. It is always a refreshing sight when they stroll through our front gates alongside the always amazing and entertaining ANDREA, ANNA, and MARIA. This year, as in the past, we were joined by Aerie's caring and capable staff members ROMAN (and his wonderful family), DR. GREG MOORE, JOAN, ADRIENNE and CHI to assist with the class and an annual community clinic. This year's group has been as wonderful and devoted as ever. Thanks EMILY B and JOHN, ELSIE, EYLEEN, MOLLY and BETTY, HOWIE and MARILYN, OMKAR, KEYO, JON, ANDREA, and KELSEY for once again starting our year off on an unbelievably positive note. We were so pleased to have two of our favorite locals joining us for the course, JORGE and ALBAN (nuestros heroes). Thanks guys for contributing your knowledge and enthusiasm this year. We were also excited to see that long-term volunteers NATE, EMILY, and TYLER took the course while TIMO, ERIN, and MIKE got recertified. It is crucial to the Ranch to have knowledgeable and capable people on hand that will be able to respond quickly and confidently should anything go wrong. Thank you Dave, Fernando, Roman and crew for your infinite patience and persistence in teaching us so thoroughly both in the classroom and in the field. We are forever grateful for the knowledge and experience you have shared, and for making us all a little safer in our day-to-day lives. When I wrote home that I now knew when to use a three-sided occlusive dressing on a sucking chest wound, my dad wrote.... Yeah, I guess any chest wound would suck. Touché, Papa, you got me there.

In addition to absorbing more information than we ever thought possible, we managed to increase the level of shenanigans at the Ranch beyond anything I have ever seen before. Midweek celebrations included an infamous theme party of Bikers and Janitors. Nate set up an ink station, providing tattoos to the new biker gang sprouting up on the premises, and the McEvoy family busted out full regalia, including a new mohawk for Dave. Good times were had by all shared over a seemingly endless lineup of Imperiales. Final fiestas included the crowning of Aerie royalty, a showdown between the Woofers and the Wussers, and an inspired revision of the Rolling Stones

classic, "I can't get no satisfaction."

Who knew the ancients could sing so movingly about none other than fecal impaction? Ah, singing about poop... would it be the Ranch without some compost humor? I have to say, however, the McEvoy ladies stole the show from us all. Thanks to the comic genius of Anna and Maria, we had one of the most brutally funny spoofs on Fernando's snake charmer antics one could imagine. Thank you ladies, for filling our lives with your laughter and ageless humor. Overall, I couldn't think of a better way to start out 2007, surrounded by Aerie leaders and Ranch rockers, learning skills that have enhanced my life and inspired me to think beyond my assumed capabilities.

It's gonna be a great year.

Conservation Update: *El Paso de las Lapas*

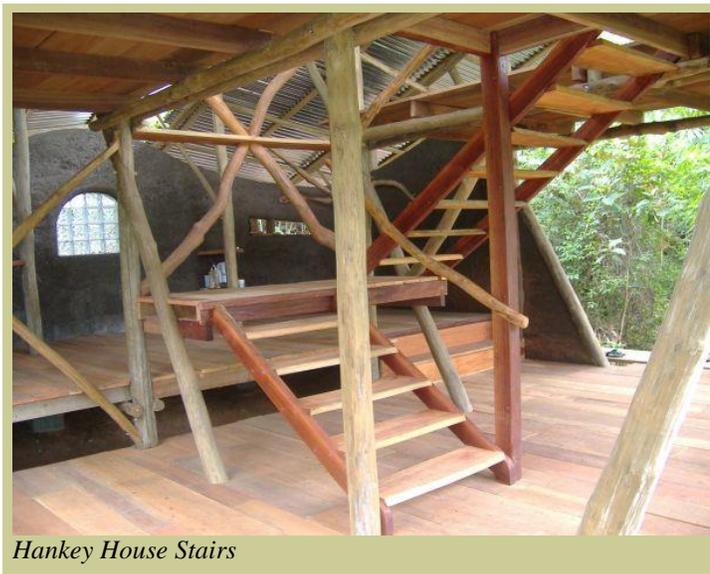
Costa Rican President Oscar Arias dropped in to town a few weeks back to sign a decree announcing the creation of Costa Rica's newest biological corridor, "El Paso de las Lapas", or in English, "The Path of the Scarlet Macaw". Theoretically, it will connect the La Cangreja National Park, our backyard, with Carara National Park via the La Potenciana Mountains. The Ranch's private wildlife refuge will make up an important part of the new protected swath of land that will with any luck endow scarlet macaws and other animals indigenous to our area freer movement and increased habitat. The arrival of Costa Rica's highest elected official was a pretty thrilling affair for Mastatal, even though the morning of his visit seemed like any other in our quiet little town, except for the sound of helicopters in the distance. The President arrived about an hour after breakfast

photo by World Wildlife Federation

in an old whirlybird and set down on our dilapidated soccer pitch. Thankfully, the vehicle's large propeller cleared the field of the recently moved grass in a matter of seconds, a job that would've taken hours with the help of many willing hands and a dozen rakes. It was fascinating to see the simplicity of his arrival. The decades old helicopter. The almost complete lack of overt security. As we took it all in we could only imagine what the scene would have looked like if our Highest in Command were making a visit to Mastatal. Dark sunglass-donning Secret Service agents in front of every house in town. Caravans of monstrous SUVs on every square inch of our unpaved roads. Cameras and reporters everywhere. Mobs of people lining the streets. Except for the simple fact that helicopters landed on our soccer field, it could've been just about any other day of the year here. It was so refreshing.

Arias' modest convoy passed through our town center en route to the entrance to La Cangreja, the site for the day's activity. TIMO and ROBIN were able to attend the event and had the opportunity to speak with Don Oscar for a few seconds before he and other powerful politicians spoke about the new biological corridor. The President was amazingly approachable, dressed simply, and seemed interested in what everyone had to say. It was evident that this was not his first day as a political

leader. President Arias presided over Costa Rica's political affairs as its Top Dog one time before, holding the presidential post from 1986-90, during which time he won himself a Nobel Peace Prize. The jury's still out as to what Oscar's legacy will be this time around. He is a strong proponent for a free trade agreement with the US, something that many environmentalists and workers rights activists are strongly opposed to. But regardless of what happens from here forward, at least Don Oscar has helped us take one more step towards being the most sustainable community on Earth. It will now be time to help in any way that we can to facilitate the implementation of the new biological corridor management plan. And let's hope that Costa Rica's politicians continue to take a stronger stand on protecting Costa Rica's most important resource: its rainforests.



Hankey House Stairs

Building Report: A Smith's Hankey Pankey

Last year my annual winter volunteer stint in Mastatal coincided with the early stages of Hankey house construction. Having gotten to know Hankey fairly well through silly conversations under a baking sun, while he educated me as to the finer aspects of building construction, and just as often over a few shots of rum and 3 to 7 Imperiales at the Pulperia, I never doubted that the Hankey House would eventually be an awesome structure. But I have to admit, when Hankey, accompanied by several volunteers laid out the long poles of scraped teak that would eventually be the frame out on the ground, I

just didn't get it. It looked like a bunch of giant Popsicle sticks randomly tossed about by some alien giant. Then the day came to raise the first section of the frame. What an exciting moment! Fifteen to 20 people, as many hands as possible pulling sections of rope to bring those giant popsicle sticks upward. And still, I looked and did not see what in hell Hankey was building. Frame after frame, week after week, laid about the ground, labeled and numbered with some weird scheme that only the Hankster (and possibly GREG WATSON or ROCK STAR DAVE) could possibly understand, then raised upward, left standing to be finished after my departure. "What will this place look like?" I wondered.

Well here I am a year later lucky to be back at the Ranch, sleeping my nights away in that same Hankey House. What a structure! And what vision by the Hankster. Now with plank floors, a cobbed front entrance, an angled roof and perfectly placed sleeping sections and an open back facing the sights and sounds of the forest, the Hankey House is an incredibly built and beautifully original structure. Many construction projects like railings, bamboo lamps, and shelving are now underway to make the Hankey House feel more like home to the several long-term volunteers who are enjoying the heck out of our space. In the upcoming weeks, a side/front porch will be constructed to allow even more chill space in an already airy and spacious environment. Thanks Hankey! You're a genius. Get your butt back down here to see your work being enjoyed by all of us. I'll meet ya at the Pulperia. First two rounds on me.

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: A Rock-Star Holiday Week, Part II

"When the sun is in the southern house, and the moon aligns with Mars," we at the Ranch take on completely new personas. Whether it be that of Boy George or the Beatles, our inner rock-stars surface and our legends shine on. The second annual Christmas Drink `n' Sync was a smashing success as even Timo triumphantly made it through an entire song without missing a syllable, although he may have left a brown stain on both one unlucky leather chair as well as the Ranch's long-term memory bank. Luckily, according to Robin, "that's good enough for me and my Bobby McGee." Others were even more thankful. One Welshman used his newfound fame to score some "free love on the Freelove Freeway." More impressively, one lively couple synchronized a dance to accompany synchronized lips. Have you ever tried patting your head while rubbing your gut? Elementary in comparison to these farmers with flair. J.T. respectably kept his hands to himself even with Janet Jackson in the house as some of our favorite local kids introduced some Latino heat to the stage. Not only is that remarkable, "that's ****ing teamwork."



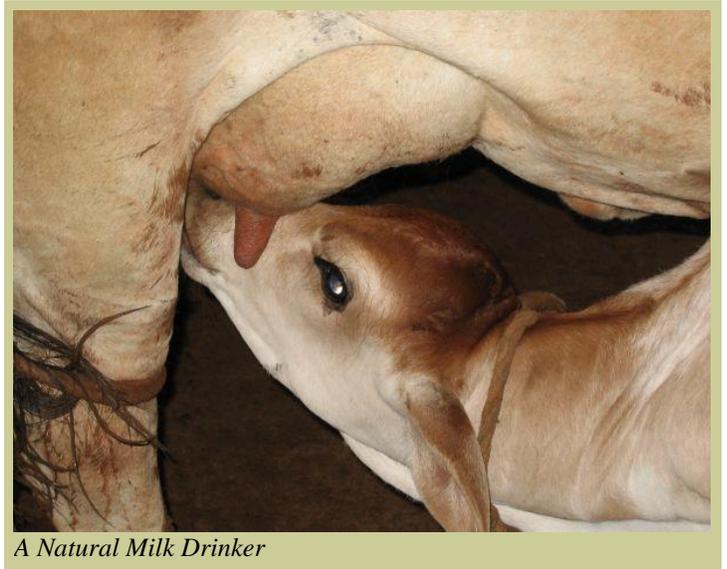
Lip Synch, featuring Jeff, Sparky & Stacy

As the most important and entertaining night of the year comes to a close, we mentally prepare ourselves for the most important and competitive day of the year. Boxing Day continues to stand as the Ranch's primary day of sport. This year's teams were once again drawn at random. Team Darodee consisted of Paul, Guy, Nate, Seth, Jacq, Meg, and Larissa. Blocking their path to victory was Thugz 4 Hugz, including Timo, Robin, Mike, Erin, Dickey, Kathy, and Sparky (the seventh wheel). Thugz 4 Hugz manhandled Darodee in Ultimate Frisbee, kickball, wiffle-ball, and the egg-toss, but got thrashed in the tug-of-war and ping-pong matches. A horseshoes draw at the Elmer Hohl sealed a Thugz victory, allowing us all to crash immediately after dinner instead of struggling through a round of Cranium. It was a full day of sun, fun, and puns... like this one... "Darodee cracked under the pressure" (egg-toss), or "Thugz just couldn't pull through" (tug-of-war). Try making one up on your own. Now, be sure to be here next year on the 26th of December and cleverly yet confidently articulate your pun at just the right moment.

This week of high-energy entertainment came to a close with the New Year. New Year's Eve night was once again marked with a raging bonfire at the Choza, which was easily bright enough to illuminate a variety of new head and facial hairstyles. Meanwhile, Dickey enhanced an already amazing atmosphere with his acoustic guitar and vocal ingenuities. This all set the stage for a fiesta that would continue into the wee hours of morning at our favorite local cantina with some of our favorite local friends. Robin informed us all that the first day of the year supposedly reflects how the rest of the year is going to be. If that is indeed the case, we're going to need some new hammocks very soon and possibly even some pillows for the ping-pong table.

Community Facts/Stories: Milk Comes from Cows

Grab that udder like it's the handle on a suitcase full of a million bucks, pull down, and watch that stream of white spurt into a bucket below. Now, do it again about a hundred more times, and you've got yourself a gallon of milk. Of course, don't forget to be weary of the variables. Cows do not produce lemonade or chocolate, so stay alert and make sure that tail is tied down tightly between that bovine's back legs! Pay no mind to the fact that Maritza is busting out twice as much as you and a partner in half the time on a set of much more difficult utters without breaking a sweat while sporting her flashy platforms and cracking jokes on you with her smiling daughter Melissa. She has been at this for years. But alas, her workload has grown as her sons have found employment elsewhere. She now tackles this chore alone or sometimes with only Melissa and her son Roger. As capable as she is, it is always nice to give her a hand when possible, and she loves the company. It is a great way to practice up on your Spanish and experience some inter-cultural dialog while simultaneously getting a nice little arm-workout and often laughing uncontrollably. If any future vols are interested in getting a jump-start on their work days, this is the perfect opportunity.



A Natural Milk Drinker

Some of this milk will make its way down to the Ranch and play a key role in our breakfasts, coffee and tea, meals, and desserts. I believe it was Louie Pasteur who once said, "heat it up to 180 degrees Fahrenheit to kill all the bad stuff in it, and then you can drink it and use it in your foods, and it will probably be delicious." Well, he was mostly correct. But could he turn it into yogurt and/or cheese? Most likely. I guess we have a lot in common. Now, if you'll excuse me, the Shmack is calling...

Comida Corner: Wasabi Tempura

This instantly has become an all time Ranch favorite. Robin even woke up having dreams of eating heaps and heaps of golden veggies. Although frying is a bad word in most kitchens, this is well worth the extra oil. The recipe comes from Didi Emmons' The Vegetarian Planet. Her recipe is for asparagus but since that is one of the veggies we don't get down here in the tropics we use whatever we have on hand, broccoli, carrots, eggplant, and onions were some of the favorites. We are serving this on sushi night and it ROCKS!

Makes 16 tempura pieces (although we found the broccoli need more batter than the carrots)

Veggies cut into rounds

¾ cup unbleached white flour (we used sifted whole wheat)

2 tablespoons cornstarch

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon sugar

1 teaspoon baking powder
1 teaspoon ground ginger
2 teaspoons (or more) of wasabi powder
¼ cup water
½ beer (any kind will do)
About 2 cups canola or corn oil

1. Prepare veggies
2. In a bowl, mix together the flour, cornstarch, salt, sugar, baking powder, ginger and wasabi.
3. Add the water and beer to the flour mixture, and whisk slowly until the batter is smooth. Transfer the batter into a pan at least 8 inches wide
4. In a saucepan or skillet at least 8 inches in diameter, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Test the oil by dropping in 1/2 teaspoon of the batter. If it immediately bubbles and fizzes, the oil is ready. Dip the veggies into the batter, then drop them into the oil, being careful not to splash the oil too much. Cook until golden on both sides. Remove them to paper towels with a large slotted spoon. Dip and fry the remaining veggies and blot them on the paper towels. Serve the tempura immediately.

F?tbl Follies: When the Grapevine Turns Sour

I guess by now I have become a little wary of the word on the streets of Mastatal. Our little hamlet here is an ever-boiling cauldron of gossip, and you're lucky to escape its heat. The rumor trains going around stop in every station they can, picking up the latest in everything from local romance to random international news to the wacky world of fútbol. While the getting's good on all fronts, it is with that last topic that we are most concerned here.

Back in November, the big hullabaloo among the youths was the upcoming San Miguel campeonato to begin in January. Having lost to the predictably rambunctious blue and yellow jerseys in last July's final, the Galácticos were loving the chance to seek victory on their rival's home turf. San Miguel has been doing a good job maintaining its pitch, and the minimal travel involved every Sunday would be ideal for a multiple week tournament. Indeed, after such a long hiatus without any action for the yellowshirts, a local campeonato to kick off the summer was looking pretty nice. Thus, I left for a two-month stint stateside with the grand anticipation of jumping right back onto the field in January.

While I did return to a whirlwind of Mastatal gossip following the holidays, the news from up the road was less exciting. No more tournament. Reason: unclear. Alternative: unspoken. Surprised? Not so much. But how then were we to maintain our exquisite physical fitness levels we've worked so hard to develop? Thanks to dry skies and a volunteer force to be reckoned with, the pitch has been playing host to a number of intense Frisbee sessions, oftentimes followed by arm curling workouts at the Elmer Hohl. As for the next official outing of Los Galácticos, keep your ear to the dirt road, but no guarantees you won't just end up with a soiled face.

NOTE: For the true aficionados out there, UEFA Champions League starts up again February 20th, and all four English teams are looking to exert their prowess. Can Barcelona follow up its impressive performance of last year without superstar Samuel Eto'o? Can Celtic maintain its cinderella run? Will the Italian squads continue to play dirty? Tune in for Round of 16 action.

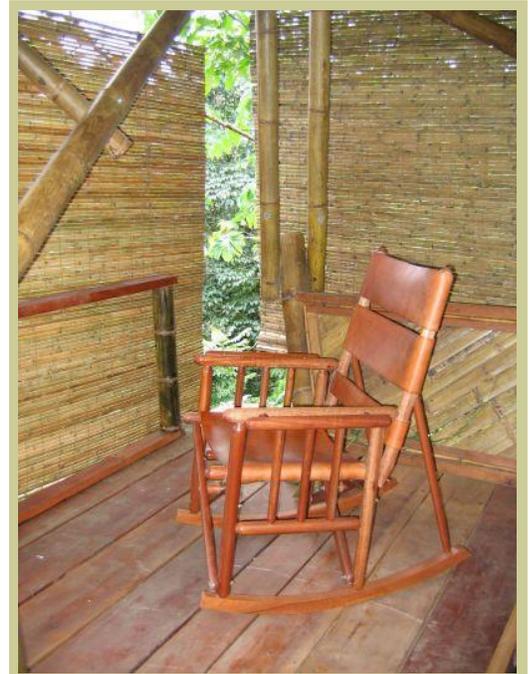
Inspirational Impressions: How to Build Furniture

"Just take a bunch of materials and then build them into the shape of the furniture you are trying to make."

----Dickey Shattell

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew



A fine piece of Mastatal's handmade furniture